



SNR MANCOM CHAIR'S REPORT 2024

The Management Committee (MANCOM) comprises representatives from Knysna Municipality, LIRA, SANParks and the Steenbok Nature Reserve Trust. These four stakeholders assist with the maintenance and upkeep of the Reserve and make sure the yearly Management Plan is followed. Steenbok Nature Reserve's success is due to these enthusiastic and creative individuals collaborating with each other to ensure that this precious space is a welcoming, natural, open space for all to enjoy. This report covers all the projects that have been completed in 2024 and a thank you to all who have assisted with advice, labour, suggestions and donations throughout the year.

The Reserve is multifaceted and sometimes maintaining a balanced experience for all can be quite challenging. The large open space between Links Drive and the Towpath, which most visitors fondly refer to as Steenbok Park, is an area enjoyed and shared by groups of local and overseas tourists, joggers, soccer players, cyclists, dog walkers and nature enthusiasts. Kingfisher Creek and Lands End are protected areas of wetlands, salt marshes, natural forests and sand dunes and access to these areas is more controlled.

MAIN PROJECTS UPGRADES AND MAINTENANCE COMPLETED IN 2024

Protection of Kingfisher Creek and Lands End

For a number of years this protected area has been damaged with an increased number of cyclists, walkers and dogs off leads disturbing the flora and fauna. A project was started in 2022 to Save Kingfisher Creek and temporary information boards were placed. This proved very successful and in 2024 permanent info boards and foot markers were introduced to the area as well as a few post and rail barriers.

Reserve maintenance - The natural areas in Steenbok are maintained weekly by our Reserve maintenance team, volunteers, Knysna Municipality and SANParks. As well as the weekly roster, these teams also monitor and report on our protected flora and fauna. Every year we have three main counts, the CWAC bird count that takes place in February and August. The SANParks Rangers assist with the yearly Brunsvigia count in February and the Spring count of the protected orchid which grow mainly west of the tennis courts, Kingfisher Creek and Lands End. The counts are recorded on our website for easy access to monitor the changes over the years.

Infrastructure maintenance - When grouped, Steenbok's infrastructure maintenance covers a wide range of items. This year, with the help of donations from our Trust members, we were able to upgrade the irrigation system, level and repair the main entrance parking area and repaint the seedpod and toolshed. Eight damaged wood and concrete benches have been replaced with new recycled plastic ones. Two new dog bins have been placed at Lands End. The signs in Steenbok have also been improved with five new entrance signs, three new cyclists give way signs, and new bee and tree educational signs.

Website upgrade - The Steenbok website is regularly updated with information about the flora and fauna found in the Reserve, as well as new features and fact sheets. This year Sharon and Simon from S2Web generously donated their time and expertise to improving the overall look of Steenbok's website with updated photos, and with four new fauna sites that include pages on insects, arachnids, reptiles and mammals that are found in the Reserve.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

Invasive weed control - Removal of invasive weeds was one of this year's main objectives. With the assistance of Ivy Garden Services and our hack group volunteers a large number of invasive weeds were removed from the edge of the Towpath and common play area. These efforts have resulted in an increased growth of the indigenous salt marsh plants.

Environmentally friendly herbicide - A non-poisonous spray to control the grass growing through the paving was introduced at the beginning of 2024. We have replaced Roundup weed killer with a poison free spray - (salt, vinegar, dishwashing liquid and essential oil) that is proving to be quite successful. Test runs were done during December and after a successful trial and at the beginning of January we were able to spray the entire pathway. This process is a bit more time consuming but we are very happy with the results and feel it is well worth the effort.

Volunteers - There are a wide variety of enthusiastic volunteers helping out in Steenbok. One Saturday a month we have a volunteer 'hack' group who come in and help with the garden maintenance of weeding, pruning and propagating plants. These volunteers also participated with the ocean clean up held in Knysna in September 2024.

PR & COMMUNICATION

Fundraising events - The Steenbok community was treated to a wide variety of events this year. Early in January Robert Smith gave an informative and entertaining bird talk featuring the waders that are found on the banks of the Knysna Lagoon. He also expressed a special request to all dog walkers about the need to prevent dogs running freely on the sea shore and inter-tidal wetlands. This message was well received and we have already noticed a great reduction of dogs chasing birds along the Towpath's water edge.

In March Prof Richard Barnes talked on research he is undertaking for Rhodes University and Nelson Mandela University. His talk highlighted the vital role our seagrass beds play in supporting the health of our planet. We are privileged to have the support of someone as knowledgeable and renowned as the Professor. Richard is a familiar figure, visiting Knysna annually, and can often be seen taking samples along our shoreline. And although his research is complex, he entertained the audience with facts and anecdotes which opened our eyes to the fragile biodiversity of these intertidal ecosystems.

Doc Caldwell hosted two very popular afternoon events this year. In June, he amused his audience with his comical original skits and shared the stage with songs and music from the Honey Bee Music School and the Lagooners Choir the festivities concluded with a jovial audience participation sing along. At the beginning of November, Doc's second fundraiser featured South African bass-baritone Christiaan Snyman who performed classical favourites and songs from musicals.

Every year the Steenbok Committee offers new and creative products to sell at the LI Festival. This year's theme was "Make Friends with Nature". The Festival-goers had a choice of a unique range of hand knitted bug beanies (representing the small creatures found in the Reserve) as well as our popular Children's Activity Book, licence disc stickers and raffles.

School visits - Scholars are encouraged to participate and learn in the Reserve and there are many ways to do this. At the beginning of this year the Oakhill students, who need to collect their community service hours towards Life Orientation for matric, helped with the removal of invasive *Nephrolepis cordifolia* - sword fern and *Melia azedarach* (*Meliaceae*) - syringa trees.

Social media - There are two platforms that Steenbok Nature Reserve uses to inform the public about daily happenings and upcoming events. These fast growing platforms are becoming very popular, with over 2000 followers on Facebook and 600 followers on Instagram.

The rainfall statistics for the Reserve have a popular following. Dave Reynell and Peter Godsell record the rainfall, and we post this on our media platforms and noticeboards, showing monthly and annual comparisons.

DONATIONS

Thank you to all the members of the Steenbok Nature Reserve Trust for your yearly membership fee donations. In most cases our members choose to donate a little extra that is a welcome addition to our finances. This year we also received some very special donations: Arthur Field made and donated a new swing for the children's play area. March Lily (*Amaryllis belladonna*) bulbs from Rod and Eve Myburgh.

A bequest from the late Brian Robinson. Brian also donated the dog water bowl at the entrance gardens which he cleaned and filled every morning during his visits to Steenbok. Thank you Brian the Friends of Steenbok will miss you!

This year KM donated 14 indigenous trees and was on site to help with the positioning and planting. Two of these trees were planted at the main entrance as replacements for the dying *Buddleja salignas*.

Lastly, a personal thank you to the 2024 Steenbok sub committee, it has been a pleasure being part of this dedicated, hard working group. Lexi - organising our volunteers and creating an exciting and informative social media platform. Ingrid - encouraging more visitors to become proud Friends of Steenbok and securing our KM Grant in Aid. Bev - a true ambassador, in the Reserve nearly every day she does a great job of overseeing the dog and litter management. James - on call any time of day to assist the committee with budget, spending and planning. Dave - for conceptualising and assisting with all Steenbok's projects and maintenance tasks.

Diana Stromberg Chair MANCOM

December 2024